



**ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY**

Presented to -  
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by the Author -  
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# THE LAST OF THE ILLINI

OR

## THE LEGEND OF STARVED ROCK

### A TALE OF ILLINOIS

BY

W. N. ROUNDY



CHICAGO

1916

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DEDICATION  
to the  
MEMORY  
of  
PONTIAC  
A Man of Vision





***The Last of The Illini or  
The Legend of  
The Starved Rock***

## PRELUDE.

The story that I fain would fashion,  
Is a legend of the Indians;  
Floated down from misty ages,  
From the twilight times long vanished,  
When the copper colored Redmen  
Roamed in pride these vast prairies,—  
Free and careless as the eagles;  
Wild as storm-clouds in a tempest;  
Happy like all things unfettered.

'Tis of old times that I tell you:  
Of the days when all these regions  
Scarcely knew a white man's footprint;  
When the panther, deer and bison  
Shared these meadows, plains and wood-  
lands  
With the wild and wandering tribesmen—  
The Kickapoos, the Sacs and Foxes;  
The Ottawas and Pottawatomies:  
Last of all and of all greatest,  
The ruling nation, the Illini;—  
'Tis the latter and their death-song  
Makes the burden of my story.

# THE LAST OF THE ILLINI.

## Canto I.

### 1.

From the Wabash far to westward,  
To the lordly Mississippi;  
From the Ohio far to northward,  
To the pine lands of Wisconsin,  
Roamed of olden the Illini;  
O'er the prairies hunted bison;  
Chased the antelope and red deer;  
Caught the mink, muskrat and beaver;  
Held their festivals and corn dance;  
Danced their scalp dance and their sun  
    dance;  
Made themselves as glad as might be;  
Called these limitless prairies  
Homeland—saying they were given  
By their Father—the Great Spirit.

### 2.

Men alone are strong and mighty,  
Who forever toil and struggle;  
Action maketh Gods and Freemen;  
Sloth is but the sire of cowards.

## 3.

In their early days of glory  
Strove in labor the Illini;  
Followed hunting for subsistence;  
Played at ball for sport and pastime;  
Went to war because they loved it.  
All things would they do and suffer,  
That could make them still more rugged.  
In the autumn they made journeys,  
Southward to the Smoky Mountains,  
Over many broad swift rivers,  
Past the country of green meadows,  
Past the salt springs and the deer licks,  
To the country of the Choctows,  
There to buy or trade for pottery;

## 4.

In the springtime, oft a party,  
Made of picked and eager young men,  
Restless for some far adventure,  
Would in light canoes of birch bark,  
Push far up the Mississippi,  
Then into the clear Wisconsin,  
Next by portage to the Green Bay,  
They would reach Lake Michigamia,  
Whose blue waters and cool breezes,  
Wooded them ever hither, thither,

To explore the world and find them  
Fairer facts to fit their Fancies—  
Hardy youths must still be dreamers.  
Whether north or south they paddled,  
On the great vast waste of waters,  
Always their home route was ever  
By the dull Checagou river.  
When by portage to the Des Plaines,  
Down they floated to their village.  
Not disputeless were these journeys—  
Rather would it often happen,  
Every camp ground showed fierce fighting;  
Every portage heard wild war-whoops.

Thus they spent the speeding seasons;  
Ever growing strong by action,  
Molding still their hearts to hardships,  
And by fiercest of adventures,  
Making good to sight of nations,  
The meaning of their chosen race-name,  
The Illini—first of all men.  
But at length came years of plenty;  
On the fertile river bottoms,  
Waved for miles the yellow corn fields,  
Lifting proudly their full bounty,  
Waiting for the time of harvest,  
When the squaws with willow baskets,

Came to pluck the ears full ripened.  
Game and fish leaped all around them;  
From the chase and from their trapping,  
Still the hunters came full handed,  
While the fishers in the river  
Found it tiresome to bring homeward,  
All the strings of pike and catfish;  
Having more than what they needed,  
They forebore their restless striving,  
Satisfied with mere enjoyment—  
Then they revelled and they feasted:  
They reclined beneath the shade trees,  
Telling tales to one another;  
While at eve by gleam of camp fire,  
They would sit beneath the twilight,  
With sparkling eyes and swelling bosoms,  
Harkening ancient deeds of valor.

## 7.

While at ease lived the Illini,  
Midst their game and corn in plenty,  
To the East and West and Northward,  
Hungry eyes watched their good fortune,  
Hungry ears drank in their feasting,  
Parched lips kept repeating over:  
All good things are overflowing,  
In the land of the Illini!

Like a fire before the West wind,  
Spread the news of their abundance:  
Swiftly came Earth's word in answer.  
From the East, the fierce Five Nations,  
Making war upon the Hurons,  
On the Shawnees and Miamis,  
Finding that their store of deer meat,  
Was becoming low and lower,  
Would say simply: We are victors,  
Let us push a little farther,  
To the land of the Illini,  
There all things are waiting for us!

From the dark woods of Wisconsin,  
After cold and rugged winters,  
Came the gaunt-eyed Winnebagoes,  
Fierce as wolves with spur of hunger,  
To the land of the Illini;  
Giving war-whoops as their payment,  
For their gracious entertainment;  
With perchance a flight of arrows,  
Or swift blows from heavy war-clubs;  
Leaving groans of dead and dying,  
As their gifts to the Illini,  
For the corn-meal and the deer meat.

## 8.

Thus from many different nations,  
Came unceasing feud and forage,  
As Earth's answer to their fortune.  
Though at first they fought and conquered,  
Beating back the roving strangers,  
Who would rob them of their plenty;  
Yet more oft, the fierce invaders,  
Left red marks of blood behind them;  
Left bleak wails of mourning kinsmen;  
Left dismay and desolation,  
By the gently flowing river,  
In the land of the Illini.

So in time this mighty nation,  
Great in spirit and in numbers,  
In fame and strength were sadly broken;  
In numbers much decreased and lessened,  
By their very reputation,  
As a race of peace and plenty,  
As possessors of abundance.

## 9.

A little space of respite reached them,  
Through the efforts of the Frenchmen,  
Who first came on explorations,  
Down the gently flowing river;  
Father Maquette, mild voiced preacher;



Joliet, the youthful trader;  
Bold La Salle and noble Tonti:  
These as friends helped the Illini;  
Fought with them against their foemen,  
Or invoked protection for them.  
'Gainst the wandering fierce Five Nations,  
Or the fighting wild Dacotahs.

Only for a brief, glad season,  
Did the Frenchmen guard and aid them:  
Even then the cunning traders,  
Undermined them with their whiskey;  
Gave them lies for their believing,  
Till at length came on the English,  
The Virginia frontiersmen,  
Men as fierce as any savage.  
While the terrors of the country,  
The far-roving, fierce Five Nations,  
Kept them all alert for battle,  
Thinned their numbers by quick onslaughts,  
And reduced by force and cunning,  
The power of this mighty nation.  
Pontiac, the far-famed chieftain,  
Roused the valor of their young men,  
In the splendid cause of Freedom,  
And of vengeance 'gainst the white man;  
Led them far away to battle,  
Many led away forever.

'Tis at such time, weak in numbers,  
Scarce five hundred able warriors,  
That Fate descended in its fury,  
Over the ill doomed Illini.

## 10.

Born far north of diverse parents,  
Half Ojibway, half Ottawa,  
No wise kin to the Illini,  
Save as member of the Metai,  
Pontiac, the chief of chieftains,  
Years before, by deeds of valor,  
Raised his name before his People,  
Till he overruled the country,  
East and Westward from the Hurons;  
Gaining ground, he gained ambition;  
Gaining likewise hate for white men:  
(For the wrongs the Redmen suffered,  
Cried aloud to God for justice,  
Called for action to their leaders).

Then he planned a mighty movement,  
'Twas no less than one great race-league.  
Which uniting all the Redmen,  
Should in purpose be the death-knell  
Of the savage white invaders,  
That is, of the savage English;  
For the Indians loved the Frenchmen,  
Since they intermarried with them.

## 11.

It was Pontiac who planned it,  
Planned this great league of the Redmen;  
He the greatest,—save Tecumseh,—  
Who by wisdom, strength and valor,  
Ever tried to stem the onrush  
Of the white men o'er the Redmen.  
Far he journeyed, this great warrior,  
From the Northland to the Southland,  
From the East unto the Westland,  
Ever urging and exhorting  
His red kinsmen to arouse them,  
To surround and kill the white wolves,  
Ere the chance for action vanished.  
Through a hundred tribes he wandered,  
Some so far their tongue he spake not,  
Speaking to them through sign language.

## 12.

Once he called the tribes together,  
Where Lake Huron is united,  
To Lake Erie by a river,  
Where Detroit has since been builded;  
There for months he fought the English,  
Held them all behind their redoubts;  
Scared them, awed them, starved them,  
shot them,

And was on the verge of triumph,  
In a cunning foray on them,  
When at length the siege was broken,  
By the secret information,  
Of the plot to kill the English,  
Given to Commander Gladwin,  
By an Indian maid who loved him.

## 13.

Thus do love and women ever  
Mold the fate of men and nations  
Now as in those olden ages  
When the Greeks besieged the Trojans.

## 14.

Being worn out with their waiting,  
When they learned about the warning,  
Quick the clansmen vanished homeward,  
Each tribe to its woods and meadows.  
Even Pontiac could not detain them;  
Even his fierce fiery language  
Failed to hold their courage steady.  
For the redman on the warpath  
Must perceive a sure achievement,  
Must feel certain of his victory,  
Or his courage and endurance,  
And especially his patience,

Flies into a thousand pieces,  
Vanishes like smoke of grasses.  
The distinction of high courage  
Is the holding to a purpose;  
This trait only comes with training;  
Hence 'tis lacking in the savage.

## 15.

Seventeen hundred sixty-three  
Was the year of this great failure;  
Then the Peace twixt French and English  
Made another chance more doubtful.  
This Peace made between two foemen,  
Though it puzzled all the Redmen,  
Never daunted that great warrior,  
Pontiac, the chief of chieftains,  
Lessened not his hate for English;  
Only added hate for Frenchmen.

## 16.

Six full winters then succeeded;  
Now again the old thought rankled;  
Rose in Pontiac the purpose,  
To unite against the English,  
And, before the chance had vanished,  
Drive them from the Redman's homeland:  
So from place to place he journeyed,

Seeking every council meeting,  
Which might give him chance for talking  
Of the great thought in his bosom:  
Thus at length to south and westward,  
Hearing of a mighty meeting,  
To be held beside the river,  
The lordly giant Mississippi,  
Pontiac came to tell his purpose,  
And to win the warriors to it.  
Friends he had in every nation;  
Fellow clansmen bound by mystic  
Ties of lodge-lore fast unto him:  
Raven was he and an Eagle,  
Buffalo and Beaver totem,  
Likewise member of the Metai,  
The largest secret Indian order.  
For this reason, he Ottawa,  
Came the greatest Redman living,  
To the land of the Illini,  
Came to push his purposed race-league,  
For a war against the English.

Friends were there from many nations,  
Each one hating down to heart core  
The savage faces of the English,  
Waiting only for a leader.

## THE LAST OF THE ILLINI. CANTO II.

### 1.

At the village of Cahokia,  
By the mighty Mississippi,  
Was the meeting place appointed  
For a feast of ancient usage:  
Many chiefs had come together,  
Many warriors of far nations;  
Kickapoos, Pottawattomies,  
Sacs and Foxes and Ojibway,  
Many Shawnees and Miamis;  
Most in number, the Illini,  
Who were on their winter camp ground.

### 2.

With his proud head lifted haughty;  
With his black eyes flashing fury,  
There strode Pontiac, the Chieftain:  
Lonely was his heart and heavy;  
Once more had he been defeated,  
Once more had his hopes been baffled;  
Once more had his faith and trusting  
To the promises of white men  
Been destroyed like reeds wind-broken,  
Dreams of years had sunk to nothing.  
Though six years had come and vanished,



In his mind the old wound rankled,  
For his hatred kept it open,  
Kept it fresh for his remembrance.

## 3.

Thus his heart its chance was waiting,  
Waiting for its day of vengeance,  
The day that had been surely promised,  
By the Manitoo, the Spirit,  
To himself and to his People.  
A man was he both strong and wily;  
True as oak unto his kinsmen;  
Fierce as fire unto his foemen,  
Kingly in his looks and bearing:  
Quicker still at acts than speeches;  
Swifter still to move than linger;  
Eager always to go forward.  
Somewhat hard, stern and forbidding;  
Somewhat gentle too and winning,  
Master both of friends and strangers;  
On he strode with quick, lithe footsteps,  
To the meeting of his clansmen.

## 4.

'Twas a day of solemn feasting,  
In honor of the old achievements,  
Wrought in pastimes by the Redmen,



By the great Algonquin war-chiefs.  
Lifted up by his great purpose,  
Wrapped around as by a Vision,  
There came Pontiac, the Chieftain;  
Great in fact and great in feeling,  
As the best of his ancestors;  
In wisdom, greater than the greatest:  
They had rushed to war and triumphed;  
He had fought and he had waited;  
Gainst Time itself had been a victor;  
Like a rock was he in patience;  
Like a reed to bend when need be.  
As he passed on through the village,  
To the borders of the forest,  
The twinkling lights within the houses,  
Stabbed him like so many arrows;  
While the fort's gun with its booming,  
Telling the approach of sunset,  
Roused in him a bitter raving,  
For he saw in these an omen  
Of the Redman's sure destruction;  
In such things he saw lay hidden  
Poison that should kill his People.

## 5.

On the border of the forest,  
In a meadow fringed with oak trees,  
Was assembled the great meeting;

Round the circle of red faces,  
Firelight flung its ruddy colors,  
When toward it moved a figure,  
Prouder, sterner than all others,  
More imperious and more haughty:  
Cries of huh! huh! then ran swiftly  
Round the circle—'twas a welcome  
To the far-famed mighty chieftain.

## 6.

With a short curt word of greeting,  
He sat down within the circle,  
Listening to the common business.  
Long the feasting and carousing,  
Mong those far-met friendly clansmen,  
In that meadow hid in twilight,  
Lit up by the lonely firelight;  
Till at length, the mighty Chieftain,  
Pontiac, moved toward the centre;  
Not a sound broke on the stillness;  
Not a leaf stirred in the forest,  
As the chief of many battles,  
Stood a moment like a statue,  
Gravely searched the rows of faces,  
Painted by the ruddy firelight,  
On a curtain made of shadows,  
Then with deep voice in whose volume,

Slumbered waves of hidden passion,  
Thus he spake unto his People:

### SPEECH OF PONTIAC.

Brothers, I am glad to meet you;  
My eyes rejoice to see my kinsmen;  
My heart is kindled by your faces.  
Many years now you have known me,  
You know that I have battled for you,  
Against your foes, the hated English;  
You know I hate them now as ever.  
Forty summers have passed over,  
Since I sought them on the war-path;  
Then my hair was like the raven's;  
Now 'tis flecked with fallen snowflakes,  
It has felt the touch of winter.  
Yet my heart is strong and hopeful;  
Still I look to see the Future,  
Give back power to the Redman;  
I shall see my People happy.  
Much in former days I counselled,  
Things that ever more proved true things,  
For the Spirit sent them to me:  
Now again I speak, the last time,  
Words my lips are fierce to utter;  
In my heart, the Spirit stirs them,  
And I cannot keep them under.

You know I sent to our French father,  
Asking aid against the English:  
Weak women's words were brought back to  
me,  
Saying: All are friends together;  
Frenchmen love their foes the English,  
And the Redmen too must love them.  
I make no answer to such folly;  
Let the Frenchmen love the English;  
They may love grey wolves and panthers:  
But I say to you, my Brothers,  
We must arm and fight together,  
Must be from East to West one People;  
Must rouse ourselves and wait the signal,  
Then like lightning seize the English,  
Kill them as they kill the red deer  
In the deep snow drifts of winter;  
Sweep them from the sight of daylight,  
Leave no seed for next year's harvest.

Maybe there are some here gathered,  
Who are friends unto the English;  
Let them listen; they must follow,  
Or I'll drive them from these prairies,  
As the fire burns grass in autumn,  
Not a tuft of them shall linger.  
But we shall triumph all together;

The Manitou has whispered to me,  
Saying: All things are the Redmen's kin-  
men;

All the beasts and birds and fishes;  
All the hills and brooks and meadows;  
All the forests and the rivers;  
All the clouds within the heavens:  
He alone has known and loved them;  
Has worn his trails across the meadows;  
Has placed his dead upon the hill-tops.  
Therefore hills and plains and rivers,  
Are for him and for him only.  
This is why it must and shall be,  
That we triumph all together,—  
This is the Great Spirit's reason:

We are brothers; they are strangers;  
We are friends and they are foemen;  
We are owners; they, intruders;  
We are children of the Father,  
They are outcasts, come from nowhere:  
Will you let them dispossess you?  
Take the graves of your forefathers,  
Spoil the bones of your great chieftains,  
Scatter forth your wives and children,  
And like vultures sit in triumph,  
On your own unburied bodies?

No! you shall have better fortune;  
The Great Spirit guards his children,  
When they give their pledges to him.  
Why do bullets never reach me?  
Why are English threats as nothing?  
'Tis because I do the bidding  
Of the Manitou, the Spirit,  
Who long years ago had willed it,  
That I save you, my own People;  
That I bring you back, my brothers,  
The Glory and the Pride and Valor  
Of the warriors, your forefathers;  
You shall see the day when never  
Our great meadows and our rivers  
Shall be darkened by the English;  
The time is coming when the sunshine  
Shall see the Redmen free and happy:  
I have spoken. This you all know,  
I will act the words I utter;  
When the wampum belts are ready,  
I will lead you on the war-path.

## 7.

As he ceased, a sudden rustle,  
Running round the darkened circle,  
Showed the interest of his hearers;  
Then huh! huh! in quick succession,

Clenched the words that had been spoken.  
With a flush on his dark features,  
The mighty chieftain paused a moment,  
Looked round with an eager searching  
In his eyes of restless roving;  
Gravely took a proffered peace pipe;  
Puffed two whiffs of strong tobacco;  
Then with wave of friendly greeting,  
Strode out from the fire-lit circle,  
Out toward the darkened forest,  
Where the shadows hung together,  
Making meshes deep and solemn;  
There he went to chant his war-songs,  
And invoke the Spirit's blessing.

The meeting meanwhile broke up swiftly,  
Each man pondering o'er the war words.

8.

Just without the fire-lit circle,  
A trader had been standing silent,  
Listening to the great Chief's language,  
And his threats of war-like meaning.  
An English trader who saw foremost,  
That a war would spoil his profits;  
Quickly made he his decision:  
(Greed for money knows no conscience



And will dare all things by proxy.)  
Thus the trader acted swiftly;  
With a sly and cautious gesture,  
He called a renegade Illini,  
Who was coming from the meeting,  
Scarcely fit to know the meaning  
Of what things had taken place there,  
(Made so by the grace of whiskey)  
Though awake enough to reckon.  
That he wanted more fire-water.  
The trader knew his man to heart core;  
Beckoning him into a shadow,  
He promised then to give him whiskey,  
Powder, bullets, too, and money,  
If he killed the ancient foeman  
Of the English; the one man, also  
Who in open council meeting,  
Dared to threaten an Illini;  
These few words and then the trader,  
Went back slowly to the village,  
With his black heart wreathed in smilings:  
While the renegade Illini  
Sneaked off through the darkened shadows.

## 9.

Careless, heedless, unsuspecting,  
Many young ambitious warriors,



Kinsmen of the famous Chieftain,  
Made a circle round the camp fire,  
Waiting for their chief's returning,  
Meantime passing round the peace-pipe.  
As they smoked, from out the forest,  
Came a voice upraised in music,  
Chanting medicine and war songs,  
Asking aid from the Great Spirit.  
When they heard his deep voiced singing,  
They looked and smiled at one another,  
Knowing something was forthcoming,  
When the Chief invoked the Spirit.

## 10.

As they talked in quiet converse,  
Of a sudden, lo! a stillness  
Fell upon the flickering firelight,  
On the meadows and the wide fields,  
Over all the darkened forest;  
They listened and again they listened,  
For the voice to raise its chanting,  
For the voice of the great war chief,  
Communing with the Manitou.  
All around was solemn silence:  
Then in wonder at the stillness,  
Up they sprang from round the camp fire,  
Rushed into the gloomy forest,

And upon the crisp brown oak leaves  
Found the Chief's dead body stabbed  
    through,  
From the back by an assassin,  
The corpse of the far-famed warrior,  
Hero of a hundred battles,  
Pontiac, the chief of chieftains.

## 11.

As they raised the mournful death-song,  
From the shadows sprang in terror,  
The low and cowardly assassin,  
Born by chance and luckless fortune  
To the name but not the nature  
Of a true man, an Illini.

## 12.

Long ago the word was written;  
Both the innocent and guilty  
Must of need together suffer;  
Men are still their brothers' keepers:  
He who scorns this fact will rue it.

## 13.

Quick as speeds a flying arrow,  
Sprang three warriors hasting forward,

After the dim flying figure,  
Toward the village of Cahokia,  
The quiet, peaceful little village,  
Where beside their friends, the Frenchmen,  
Lived in winter the Illini,  
Numbering now perhaps a thousand.  
Behind them in the darkened forest,  
Rose the mournful, wailing death-song,  
Chanted by the faithful kinsmen,  
For the honor of their war-chief,  
Gone at last beyond the rivers.  
Fast flew pursued and the pursuers;  
But beside the Mississippi,  
He escaped into the darkness,  
Fled away into the willows,  
Which obscured it like a jungle.  
Seeing not but caring nothing,  
Since tribes answer for their members,  
Giving payment as requittal,  
Or more oft another member,  
Who should expiate injustice,  
Wiping out Death's wrong by dying.  
Blind with anguish, rage and horror,  
On they rushed into the village,  
Calling with loud cries the Elders,  
To deliver up the traitor,  
Or give vengeance as befitted,

That they might thus make atonement,  
For the dear blood of their kinsman,  
After the established custom.

## 14.

Then the Elders speaking gravely,  
Said in turn that they were sorry,  
Though they knew naught of the matter,  
They promised to the anguished kinsmen,  
Two Ojibways from Wisconsin;  
One Ottawa from the northland,  
That if wrong had been committed,  
Justice would in time be given,  
After the Illini blood-law:  
Thus the Elders gravely answered.

## 15.

But not so, the younger warriors;  
Decked and daubed and full of whiskey,  
They spoke out with words of boasting;  
Said their fathers were the rulers  
Of that land from East to Westward.  
Then what business had the war-chief,  
To come there to make them trouble:  
Were he dead, it were small matter;  
They could live again in comfort.

## 16.

Thus spake rashly, the young warriors,  
Made mere fools by too much whiskey.  
But in answer said the kinsmen:  
We demand our sacred blood-rites;  
Give us vengeance, or we take it;  
We have warned you; you have heard us!

Baffled, back they went in sorrow,  
All intent upon their blood-rites,  
Back to where beside the chieftain,  
Friends were raising still the death-song,  
Neath the lonely sombre shadows,  
In the darkened midnight forest.

## 17.

Having been refused their blood rites,  
Satisfaction set by custom,  
By the tribe of whom a member  
Has been guilty of a murder,  
One thing now remained before them,  
Ceaseless, bloody retribution  
On each man born an Illini.  
For by ancient Indian custom,  
Any tribe denying payment  
For the ill deed of a member,

Could be swept from off the Earth's face,  
By the kinsmen of the injured:  
Thus each clansman of the Chieftain,  
Called for war 'gainst the Illini.

## 18.

Leaving one to guard the body,  
All the rest—his friends and kinsmen—  
More than fifty all together,  
Chiefs and warriors of tried valor,  
With a parting look of anguish,  
Turning from the great dead Chieftain,  
Plunged into the lonely forest,  
Each in a diverse direction,  
And vanished through the darkened  
    shadows.

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## THE LAST OF THE ILLINI.

## Canto III.

## 1.

Blood for blood!—the cry resounded,  
Over hill and plain and meadow;  
'Twas a clansmen's shout of vengeance:  
Swifter than a coming tempest;  
Faster than the gleam of lightning;  
Wild as howl of wolves in winter.  
Speeding on it gathered fury,  
Like the cloud that bears destruction,—  
Like the tempest which Death follows,—  
Woe! unto the doomed Illini.

## 2.

All thenceforth was stir and bustle  
In the village of Cahokia:  
By the Elders word was given,  
To make ready the next morning,  
To return unto their homeland,  
Far away from the great River,  
To the stream that floweth gently,  
Specked with islands; edged with sandcliffs;  
To their village of La Ventum,—  
To the meadows of their fathers.

When the morning flung its grey light,  
Far across the wide prairies,  
Hastily within the village,  
By the mighty Mississippi,  
The Illini rose together,  
Rose and cooked a scanty breakfast,  
Then with speed of a war-party,  
Packing up their camp utensils,  
Wended forth to North and Eastward,  
Over a well beaten roadway,  
To the land of their forefathers,  
To their village of La Ventum,  
On the fertile river bottoms,  
By the gently flowing river.

Little time for rest was given;  
Urged on ever by the warriors,  
They were pushed forth to the journey.  
Three days passed in stolid travel;  
On the fourth day just at twilight,  
When they looked down on the river,  
From the cliffs that edge the valley,  
Round about the wide horizon,—  
To the North and East and Southward;  
To the Westward, too, behind them,  
Came short puffs of fire a moment,  
Which soon vanished into darkness,



Then the keen eyes of the Elders  
Grew anxious and again more anxious,  
As pushing through the gathering darkness,

They saw the signal fires repeated.  
On they hurried fast and faster;  
One or two young men and runners,  
Sped ahead unto the village,  
To give warning to the women,  
To the children and the old men,  
Who had been engaged in planting,  
To drop everything and follow:  
Whither? came the weary question,  
From an old squaw worn with labor,  
To the Rock! came back the answer.

4.

Fronting boldly to the Northward,  
With its deep indented edges,  
Worn out by the mighty waters,  
In the floods of bye-gone ages,  
There beside the gentle river  
Loomed up through the dusk of evening  
The great Rock which had been famous,  
Since the time when noble Tonti  
With a mere handful of allies,  
Beat the fierce Five Nations from it.

Round it had the torrents sweeping,  
Left it standing like a giant,  
All bereft of friends and kinsmen;  
There in grandeur stood their haven,  
Toward which now all the Illini,  
Warriors, women, maids and children,  
Went pell-mell in a wild panic,  
Headlong to escape their foemen,—  
The dead Chieftain's clan and kinsmen,  
Who were coming for their vengeance.

## 5.

As they passed across the river,  
Some in light canoes of birch bark,  
Some by fording, others swimming;  
To them came a burst of yelling,  
With a swarm of flying arrows,  
Cutting all the water round them,—  
Signal fires were bearing fruitage!  
Then the whiz of bullets o'er them,  
Showed their foemen were increasing.  
In return the warriors sent back,  
Answer by a quick sharp volley,  
Which raised death-songs up behind them,  
And grim yells of maddened fury,  
From the willows by the river;  
Just grim yells, but not the body

Of a foeman shone from cover.  
Then the swift eyes of the Elders,  
Grew relieved for well they reckoned,  
If their foes were great in number,  
They would rush forth to attack them.  
Fast they fled along the lowlands,—  
On their right the shining sand cliffs;  
On their left, the gentle river;  
And in front straight on before them,  
The great Rock in silence standing,  
Like a mighty pillar placed there,  
By the Manitoo, the Spirit,  
As a refuge for his children.  
Soon above them shone the shadows  
Of the mighty Rock,—their haven.  
To the inner side they hurried,  
Where a pathway, steep and narrow  
Wound its way unto the summit;  
There the warriors turned and facing,  
Held at bay their fleet pursuers;  
While the women and the children  
Clambered up the rocky pathway:  
One by one the warriors followed,  
While from out the trees and bushes,  
Now and then a bullet whistled,  
Or there came an arrow singing,  
Forth from out the darkened forest.

When at length they gained the summit,—  
All together, the Illini,—  
Gave a mighty yell of triumph,  
Which was answered by a war whoop,  
From the shadows by the river:

Safe at last! For who could reach them,  
There high up above the valley,  
Perched like eagles in an eyry,  
Throned like Spirits in their Cloudland?

## 7.

They were safe;—but lo! to westward,  
Gleaming through the dusk of nightfall,  
Sparks of fire leaped far to Heaven;  
Bursting flames shot gleaming upward;  
'Twas their village,—their dear homeland,  
In the grasp of the pursuers.

## 8.

Wearied with their tedious journey,  
All the warriors and the women,  
All the children and the old men,  
After having eaten supper,  
Laid them down to rest, save only  
One young brave, an Indian half-breed,

Called Le Bel, from his red mother—  
Named so from her Frenchman lover.  
He had joined them at La Ventum;  
By chance had come up there before them,  
Allured there by a maiden's black eye,  
A Shawnee maid whose village slumbered,  
Some few miles down on the river;  
Half-breed was he, yet all Indian,  
For he loved his mother's people.

## 9.

All the rest lay down to slumber,  
Leaving this young brave to guard them;  
As they slept, the only noises  
Were the whisperings of the breezes  
Through the spreading cedar branches,  
And the whippoorwills a-calling,  
From the shadows by the river.  
At the ending of the pathway,  
By the cliff's edge sat the young brave;  
In his hand a trusty rifle;  
In his belt a keen-edged dagger.  
Long he sat there like a statue,  
Hearing not a sound or ripple,  
From the world of all things living.  
Mid the stillness of the darkness,  
Soon his thoughts went down the river,—

To the Shawnee maiden's wigwam;  
Floated on the placid current,  
Stopping by her round lithe figure,  
Where he too would fain be resting.  
Held there by her radiant glances;  
Lulled by her inspired caresses;  
Wooed to slumber by her kisses.

## 10.

He was dreaming Love's fair visions,  
In the face of gloom and danger,—  
For of all moods neath the Heavens,  
Love's mood is the most heroic,—  
When the sudden soft low rolling  
Of a stone fell on his hearing:  
Then a long deep silence followed:  
All alert, he pressed him forward,  
With his eyes into the darkness.  
Swiftly stepping neath a cedar,  
Which hung o'er the gleaming sand cliff,  
At the turning of the pathway,  
There in patience then he waited:

## 11.

Soon he heard a something moving,  
Quiet as a shifting shadow,  
Not a human form he saw there,—

Just a motion in the pathway,  
As if sand were coming upward  
To its old place on the summit;  
There was movement; then a silence;  
Then again a faint ground swelling,  
In the winding of the footpath;  
Puzzled somewhat, still he waited,  
All alert with unsheathed dagger.  
From the place where he was stationed,  
One short bound would gain the summit;  
Suddenly the pathway lifted,  
And a form rose from the darkness,  
Rose and showed against the starlight  
A hand that clenched a gleaming dagger.

## 12.

Never stirring; never breathing;  
Though the stranger almost touched him,  
Stolid stood Le Bel one instant,  
Till the stealthy stranger passed him,  
Passed a step or two beyond him,  
Then he sprang like lightning on him;  
With one hand plunged deep his dagger;  
With the other hand reached forward,  
Groping for his foeman's weapon:  
'Neath the blue-black of the midnight,  
Fiercely fought those two lone foemen,—



Fought as men fight for existence.  
Back and forth they swayed and tottered;  
Gasped for breath and tugged and waited;  
Then began again, while ever  
Yawned the great void far below them,—  
Far below them loomed the darkness.  
Gradually the wound first given,  
Told upon his foe; so, rousing  
All his strength, he forced the stranger,  
Foot by foot still near and nearer  
To the cliff's edge, when all sudden,  
With a wrestler's quick maneuver  
Young Le Bel then gave his foeman,  
One great push that sent him headlong  
Downward, downward to the water;  
But so mighty was the effort,  
O'er the brink he too went crashing,  
Downward toward the yawning river.  
But his fall was brief and broken;  
For by luck a scraggy cedar  
Jutting from between two ledges  
Saved him just in time; and as he  
Swung himself back to the summit,  
From below a great splash rose up,  
Next a gurgle from the river;  
Then dropped down Night's peaceful  
silence.



## 13.

To his post then sprang the young man;  
For a moment he was tempted,  
To arouse the weary sleepers,  
But on waiting for a minute,  
When no human echoes answered  
That great splashing of the river,  
Then he knew that it was only,  
Some young brave who hoped by daring,  
To acquire a chieftain's title,  
With the midnight shadows round him,  
Like a statue still unstirring,  
Sat the young man there till morning.

## 14.

Daybreak came and looking round them,  
Lo! they saw far up the river,  
Large canoes containing warriors;  
On the lowlands they saw motion,  
Which betokened hasting allies;  
Underneath them by the river,  
Every space could show a wigwam.  
To the East and to the Southward,  
O'er the canyon on a sand cliff,  
Where their foes could watch each movement,

To the mainland there behind them,  
Warriors waited keen and eager;  
In the river right below them;  
On an isle shaped like an arrow,  
Shone the campfires of the allies,—  
Not a point of vantage empty!  
Grave grew the dark brows of the Elders,  
For they knew the situation,—  
They could read its grim hard meaning.  
But the children and the young men,  
Looking downward laughed and hooted,  
Making faces at the camp fires;  
Cried out: Stay there, you mud turtles,  
Till the rising waters sweep you  
Far away to the great River,—  
You are stupid ugly cat-fish!

## 15.

Slowly passed the days in waiting,  
With no sound save now a yelling,  
From the camp fires by the river,  
In honor of some new arrival;  
Or an answer of defiance,  
From the rock that towered skyward.

## THE LAST OF THE ILLINI.

## Canto IV.

There upon the Rock's high summit:  
Lying on the pleasant grasses,  
Or reclining 'neath the cedars,  
Chatting gaily with the maidens,  
All the thoughtless younger warriors  
Being safe and feeling valiant  
Taunted still the poor besiegers,  
Saying they were wasting labor.  
But the Elders and the women,  
Looking over the provisions,  
Found their stock was low and scanty.  
Then their grave eyes grew more anxious,  
For though meat and meal were scanty,  
Though the river flowed beneath them;  
Making pleasant little ripples,  
Not a drop of water had they.

## 2.

Water they must have and quickly;—  
So they knew but knew well, likewise,  
Night must first come down to shield them.  
Long they waited for the darkness,—  
First they saw the Day's glare lessen;

In the lowlands to the Westward,  
Next they saw the river shadows,  
Deepen and grow dark and darker;  
As the sun grew large and golden;  
They saw it rest one splendid moment,  
Setting on the western hill tops,  
In the midst of gorgeous colors,  
And then vanish like a monarch:  
They saw the pink light of the sunset:  
Sink behind the western shadows;  
Watched the soft green of the meadows  
Slowly change its blithesome color;  
Heard the whipporwills keep calling,  
From the darkness by the river.  
Then they saw the camp fires lighted,  
In the forests all around them;  
While above, the silver star-light  
Glimmered through the air of evening.

## 3.

As they waited, from their number,  
Eight young warriors were selected;  
With them two with water bottles,  
Made of tanned skin sewed up tightly:  
When the blackness had grown blacker,  
Till the forests merged together,  
Making all the world one shadow,

Then they crept down slow and slower,—  
Silent as the ghosts of dead men;  
Noiselessly they reached the river,  
Filled their bags and turned back upward,  
When a yell rang from the silence,  
And a volley lit the darkness;—  
Breathless watched their friends above  
    them,  
As the two with bags came straining  
Up the pathway and behind them,  
Two came limping slowly onward;  
Two came bounding up exultant,  
But the other two lay dying,  
Far below them in the shadows,—  
Such the price they paid for water.

## 4.

The first night passed away in silence;  
Still another day succeeded,  
And another day came and vanished:  
Many foes had flocked around them;  
Then another came unbidden,—  
Cunning as a creeping serpent;  
Silent, stealthy as a panther;—  
It was Hunger,—the fierce Demon.

## 5.

Like a dry wind, it came o'er them,

Parching all the earth and heavens;  
They grew faint and weak and listless;  
Heavy eyed and heavy hearted;  
In their veins, a sleepless burning,  
As if many nagging devils,  
Were at work upon their vitals.  
Of the corn-meal, not a kernel;  
Of their deer-meat not a morsel;  
Of their water not a module.  
Then they seized the shrubs and bushes;  
Split the tender sprigs half open,—  
Chewed them till they could not swallow:  
How they cried and prayed for water!  
Calling for a single rain drop:  
With the bright blue heavens o'er them,  
How they longed to see the black clouds  
Come up o'er the western hill tops,  
For they knew that they held water;  
Meanwhile still the placid river  
Mocked them with its smiling ripples.

## 6.

On the fifth day in the morning,  
Rose the mists above the valley;  
Then the clouds came scudding earthward,  
Till the whole sky-dome was darkened;  
Fell a light and gentle tapping

On the new leaves of the oak trees:—  
When the rain came down in torents.  
Like wild things they leaped to meet it;  
Opened wide their mouths to catch it;  
Snapped at it like dogs in autumn;  
Licked the rocks where it had fallen:  
Stripping off their bits of clothing,  
They let their thirsty bodies drink it;  
Through the wet grass rolled them over,  
Thankful for its happy coming,—  
The good Rain,—their benefactor.  
But as quick as they had risen,  
Soon again the storm-clouds vanished,—  
Flew away like great black eagles,  
Leaving skies all hot above them.

## 7.

Round them all the world was happy;  
Fish leaped darting from the river;  
Merry hunters chased the red deer  
Down along the lowland bottoms;  
Mild eyed ring-doves cooed above them,  
While below, they watched the white buds  
Of a cherry tree whose branches  
Flung far out into the sunshine  
The fragrance of a thousand blossoms;  
Then with eyes of pain and fury



They saw their foes at ease reclining,  
Gorged to slumber by their feasting.

## 8.

Le Bel, the young brave, had a sister,—  
Kiskilwasee, the Bright-eyed One;  
Orbs of jet and cheeks rose ruddy,  
Like good bronze that's highly polished.  
Gentle, fawn-like motions had she;  
Graceful movements; pleasant smilings;  
Modest winsome maiden manners:  
In her hands, the dimples lingered;  
On her brow lay childhood's freshness;  
Round her breathed the bloom of flowers.

## 9.

In her brother's first love making,  
Kiskilwasee often counselled,  
Showing puzzles to the young man.  
Now in turn he gave her comfort;  
Cheered her as she grew despondent,—  
Told her that perhaps some allies,  
Knitted by blood ties unto them,  
Might assist them in their trouble.  
For the maiden, dull with hunger,  
Spite of all would grow dejected.



As she heard her brother's plannings,  
Kiskilwasee only smiled then;  
Told him he must try to save him  
For the sake of his beloved one;  
For she felt that she would never  
See again the days of olden.

## 10.

Although proudly the Illini,  
Silently and uncomplaining,  
Faced their grim and direful fortune,  
Unrelenting and unswerving,  
Ruthlessly their doom descended.

## 11.

One by one they all grew weaker;—  
First the children; next the old men;  
Then the women. One by one—  
Beneath the trees, a little pappoose,  
Powerless for speech or crying,  
Would without a single whimper  
Fold its tiny hands forever:  
Mothers with gaunt haggard faces  
Would be found at break of morning  
Dead beside their dying offspring;  
Old men who had once been famous  
For a hundred deeds of valor,—

Hardships almost past the telling,  
Would lie down beneath the bushes  
And give their last breath to the Spirit;  
At the ending of the pathway  
Still the warriors watched and waited;—  
Though unfit to lift a weapon;  
Though too weak to pull a bow-string,  
From behind a dozen cedars  
Gleamed the shining rifle barrels,  
Ready for the first invader,  
While to help keep up their courage  
In this awful stress of famine,  
Bravely, feebly spake they, saying:—  
We are men! We are Illini!

## 12.

'Twas the sunset of the twelfth day,—  
Half were dead; the rest were dying;—  
By the maiden, Kiskilwasee,  
Sat Le Bel, her faithful brother,  
Gazing on his sister's features  
With unutterable anguish,  
With a pity past expression.  
Life, the Beautiful, was going  
Past the unreturning sunset;  
All the things that they had dreamed of;  
All the dreamings they had lived for;

All the hopes that they had cherished,—  
All were gone from them forever:  
Death's grim eyes were staring at them;  
Death's cold face was watching o'er them;  
Death's long bony hand seemed itching  
For the chance to seize and rend them.  
O how gracious, precious Life seemed,  
Now that it was slipping from them!  
Softly whispered Kiskilwasee;—  
I would like to live, my brother,  
Until you were safe and happy:  
After all, this earth is winsome,  
When the People keep peace on it.  
We have had glad days together;  
For so much at least I'm grateful:  
If you live, remember, brother,  
That your Kiskilwasee loved you,—  
Blessed you,—wished you all good fortune!

## 13.

Death is life's one great instructor;  
Teaching tenderness and beauty;  
Opening hearts to nobler thinking;  
Bringing subtler, deeper insight  
Into mysteries of living;  
Smiting Self from its enthronement,  
Crowning Love with wreaths of laurel.

## 14.

What best moves both men and heroes  
Are the mild words of a woman;—  
Strength has need of being tender.  
When her brother heard the praises,  
First they cut him like an arrow,  
Rankling in his heart a little,—  
For he did not feel deserving;  
(Merit ever is unconscious.)  
Then the young man rose up slowly,  
Took a small red jug of pottery,  
Tied around with thong of deer skin;  
With a motion to his sister,  
Which she answered with faint smilings,  
Straight he walked toward the cliff's side,  
Where it hung above the water;  
But where trees and bushes fringed it,  
Half way down unto the river:  
Swinging from a sturdy pine tree,  
Soon he reached a ledge that jutted  
Just below the cliff's true summit;  
There he rested for a moment,—  
Being weak with weary fasting,  
Gazing at the space below him.  
Lo! he saw there by the river,  
Many boats but not a warrior;  
Much he wondered; long he lingered;

Slowly then by roots and bushes,  
Swinging down, now low and lower,  
He had almost reached the water,  
And then thinking how his sister  
Would rejoice to see his jug full,  
When a war-whoop sounded o'er him,  
Then another and another,—  
Far up on the cliff's high summit.  
His thin blood froze up within him;  
Looking down at the canoes there,  
Drawn up underneath the shadows,  
Then he understood their meaning:—  
All was over now forever—  
Naught he knew could save his people;  
For their swarming foes had waited  
Until they were weak with hunger,  
To assault and over-power them.

## 15.

Death is easier than living!—  
So he thought as high above him  
Once again the yells resounded,—  
'Twas the death-knell of a nation.  
Le Bel began to clamber upward,  
Back to where he had descended,  
Hoping he might save his sister,  
But, alas, his weak arms failed him;

Though he strove by pulling, hauling,  
To regain the rocky cliff-side,  
Time and time again he stumbled,  
Till he saw that it was useless;  
Even though he reached the summit  
He was powerless to aid her,  
Having neither strength nor weapons.

## 16.

As he pondered for a moment,  
Suddenly, as in a vision,  
Came his sweetheart's face before him,  
Filling all his soul with courage;  
Breathing farewell to his sister,  
Seizing a canoe, he launched it  
On the placid flowing current;  
Close beside the bank he kept it,—  
Close beneath the spreading elm trees,  
And the friendly fringe of willows.  
Down the stream, he let it hurry,  
Dipping very soft his paddle,  
Now and then, to keep it headed  
Underneath the welcome shadows,  
While the war-whoops rang behind him.  
After floating for a little,  
Which seemed like a thousand ages,  
Out of sound and sight and hearing

Of the bloody deeds behind him,  
With his arms made strong and wiry  
By a sudden wondrous spirit,  
Which o'er-multiplied his courage,  
He began to paddle swiftly  
To the land of life and freedom.

## 17.

Guarded by some happy fortune,  
Guided by some gracious Spirit,  
'Twas his fate to reach his haven,  
Down below him on the river,  
Where his sweetheart's heart was waiting,  
To the village of the Shawnees;  
And in time also by fortune,  
He secured all he hoped for,  
Both the maiden and a wigwam,—  
Gaining love by gift of loving.

## 18.

Meanwhile on the Rock's high summit,  
Vengeance dire and stern was doing,  
Just as if the great Chief's spirit  
Had descended for a season  
To inspire his friends and kinsmen:  
Raising high their red stone axes;  
Lifting up their bloody daggers,



There upon the Rock's high summit,  
To the stars that glittered o'er them,  
This the song those warriors chanted:—

Hear us, Kinsman,  
Mighty Chieftain!

Best and greatest of thy people:  
See the gifts we pour out for thee;  
Hear the groans we raise up to thee;  
Watch the blood that flows like water:  
Know, O Chieftain, mighty warrior,  
That the Spirit of the war-path  
Smiles upon our deeds of vengeance,  
And that o'er thy honored body  
All the earth is showering blessings;—

Hear us, Kinsman,  
Mighty Chieftain!

Best and greatest of thy people;  
Now thy death has been avenged!

19.

There among the spreading cedars,  
In the darkened twilight shadows,  
Far above the placid river,  
This victorious song was chanted;—  
Thus was Pontiac's death atoned for.



## 20.

Passed and gone, in silence vanished  
Are the Redman's days of splendor;—  
Passed like golden leaves of autumn;  
Gone like Springtime's fragile beauty;  
Fled like flowers at touch of winter.  
Yet the leaves still whisper of them;  
Still the oak trees chant their death songs;  
Still the grasses keep their graves green;  
While the Earth,—all gracious Mother,—  
Hides their bones from glare of sunlight;  
Since all Nature feels a kindness  
For the deeds and deaths of heroes.

NOTES  
TO  
CANTO I.

## NOTE 1.

“O'er the prairies hunted bison.”

One of the common modes of killing the buffalo, practiced by the Illinois and other tribes of the West, was to drive them headlong over the precipitous banks of rivers.

Buffalo Rock, a large promontory rising fifty or sixty feet high, on the North side of

the Illinois river, six miles below Ottawa, is said to have derived its name from this practice.—Davidson and Stuve's History of Illinois.

## NOTE 2.

“Held their festival and corn dance.”

The green corn dance is thus described by Catlin:—

When the doctors have decided that the corn will do, criers are sent through the village saying that the Great Spirit has been kind to them, that all must empty their stomachs and prepare for the coming feast.

On the day appointed a kettle is hung over a fire and filled with green corn which is well boiled, as a present to the Great Spirit. While this first kettle is boiling, four medicine men, with a stalk of corn in one hand and a rattle in the other, with their bodies painted with white clay, dance around the kettle, chanting a hymn to the Great Spirit. At the same time a number of warriors are dancing around in a larger

circle, holding stalks of corn in their hands, while the villagers look on.

During this scene a lot of wooden bowls are arranged on the ground, each containing a spoon of buffalo or mountain sheep's horn.

When the doctors decide the corn is boiled, it is taken out and placed on a scaffold of sticks above the fire, where it is then allowed to burn up while the dance goes on. Next the fire and ashes are removed, and a second fire made by friction, built on the same spot, and another kettle full of corn is boiled for the chiefs and medicine men. After this, unlimited license is given to the whole tribe to boil and eat corn until the fields are exhausted."—See Catlin, Vol. I, pp. 189-190.

### NOTE 3.

"Played at ball for sport and pastime."

The national game of nearly all Indian tribes was the game of LaCrosse or Bagga-tiway.

At the end of the stick was a netting of catgut, in which they caught and from which they threw the ball, but this netting

was much smaller than in the modern La-Crosse stick.

In the Chippewa or Ojibway tongue, this game is called Bang-ah-ud-o-way. It is thus described by William W. Warren, who on the maternal side had Ojibway blood in his veins:—

“This game is played with a bat and a wooden ball. The bat is about four feet long, trimmed at one end into a circular curve, which is netted with leather strings, and forms a cavity where the ball is caught, carried, and, if necessary, thrown with great force to treble the distance that it can be thrown by hand.”

Catlin (in Vol. II, page 124) gives the following account of an Indian game of ball as played by the Choctaws:

“Monday afternoon at three o’clock, I rode out with Lieutenants S. and M. to a very pretty prairie, about six miles distant, to the ball playground of the Choctaws, where we found several thousand Indians encamped.

There were two points of timber about half a mile apart, in which the two parties for the play, with their respective families

and friends, were encamped, and lying between them, the prairie on which the game was to be played. . . . Each party had their goal made with two upright posts, about 25 feet high and 6 feet apart, set firmly in the ground, with a pole across the top.

These goals were about forty or fifty rods apart, and at a point just half way between was another small stake driven down, where the ball was to be thrown up at the firing of a gun, to be struggled for by the players.

All this preparation was made by some old men, who were, it seems, selected to be the judges of the play, who drew a line (on the sides of the field) from one bye to the other, to which directly came from the woods on both sides a great concourse of women and old men, boys and girls and dogs and horses, where bets were to be made in the play.

The sticks with which this tribe play are bent into an oblong hoop at the end, with a sort of slight web of small deer thong tied across, to prevent the ball from passing through.

The players hold one of these in each

hand, and by leaping into the air, they catch the ball between the two nettings and throw it, without being allowed to strike it or catch it in their hands. . . .

In every ball play of these people it is a rule of the play that no man shall wear moccasins on his feet or any other dress than his breech cloth around his waist, with a beautiful bead belt and "a tail" made of white horse hair or quills and a "mane" on the neck, of horsehair dyed of various colors.

This game had been arranged and "made up" three or four months before the parties met to play it, and in the following manner:

The two champions, who led the two parties, and had the alternate choosing of the players through the whole tribe, sent runners with the ball sticks most fantastically ornamented with ribbons and red paint, to be touched by each one of the chosen players, who thereby agreed to be on the spot at the appointed time and ready for the play.

The ground having been all prepared and the preliminaries of the game settled, and the bettings all made, and goods all



“staked,” night came on without the appearance of any players on the ground, but soon after dark a procession of lighted flambeaux was seen coming from each encampment, to the ground where the players assembled around their respective byes, and at the beat of the drums and chants of the women, each party commenced the ball play dance.

Each party danced a quarter of an hour around their respective byes, in their ball play dress, rattling their ball sticks together in the most violent manner, and all singing as loud as they could raise their voices, while the women of the party, who had their goods at stake, formed into two rows on the line between the two parties of players, and danced also, in a uniform step, and all the voices joined in chants to the Great Spirit, in which they were soliciting His favor in deciding the game to their advantage, and also encouraging the players to exert every power they possessed in the struggle that was to ensue.

In the mean time, four old medicine men, who were to have the starting of the ball, and who were to be judges of the play, were

seated at a point where the ball was to be started, and busily smoking to the Great Spirit for their success in judging rightly and impartially between the parties in so important an affair.

This dance was one of the most picturesque scenes imaginable, and was repeated at intervals of every half hour during the night, and exactly in the same manner, so that the players were certainly awake all the night, and arrayed in their appropriate dress, prepared for the play which was to commence at nine o'clock the next morning.

In the morning at the hour, the two parties and all their friends were drawn out and over the ground, when the game commenced by the judges throwing up the ball at the firing of a gun, when an instant struggle ensued between the players, who were some six or seven hundred in number, and who were endeavoring to catch the ball in their sticks and throw it home and between their respective stakes, which when successfully done counts one for game.

In this game every player is dressed alike, that is, divested of all dress, except



girdle and tail, which I have before described, and in these desperate struggles for the ball when it is up . . . there are rapid successions of feats and incidents that astonish and amuse, far beyond the conception of any one who has not had the singular good luck to witness them.

For each time that the ball has passed between the stakes of either party, one was counted for their game, and a halt of about one minute, when it was again started by the judges of the play, and a similar struggle ensued, and so on until the successful party arrived to 100, which was the limit of the game.”—Catlin, Vol. 11, pp. 124 to 126.

#### Note 4.

“The Illini—first of all men.”

Illini is a French corruption of the Algonquin words “in” and “nini,” meaning “the man,” Latin *vir*., equivalent to our modern slang phrase, “we, the people,” as if there were no other people.

The main tribe of Illinois Indians were the Kaskaskias.

“This is the name of the tribe that formerly occupied, and of course owned, a vast

tract of country lying on the east of the Mississippi . . . and now forming a considerable portion of the great and populous state of Illinois.

Perhaps there has been no other tribe on the continent of equal power with the Kaskaskias, that have so suddenly sunk down to complete annihilation and disappeared. The remnant of this tribe have long since merged into the tribe of Peorias of Illinois, and it is doubtful if one dozen of them are now existing.

With the very few remnants of this tribe will die in a few years a beautiful language, entirely distinct from all others about it, unless some enthusiastic person may preserve it from the lips of the few who are yet able to speak it."—Catlin: N. A. Indians. Vol. II, p. 100.

"From the East the fierce Five Nations."

The Iroquois

Oneidas

Senecas

Onondagas

Cayugas

Mohawks

"In 1712 they were joined by the Tusca-

roras from North Carolina, who constituted the sixth member of the confederacy.”

“All the mighty concerns of the Iroquois were the subject of full deliberation, in open council, and their diplomatic negotiations were managed with consummate skill. When the question of peace or war was decided, the counsellors united in chanting hymns of praise or warlike choruses, which at the same time gave expression to the public feeling, and imparted a kind of natural sanctity to the act. The majority of those who have given their attention to Iroquois history, have recognized in their public acts the germs of a national policy which would have been characterized by greater subtlety and strength than that of the Aztecs under Montezuma or of the Peruvians under Atahualpa.”—Schoolcraft:—Archives of Aboriginal Knowledge, Vol. VI, p. 189.

“Their great men, both sachems and captains, are generally poorer than the common people, for they effect to give away and distribute all the presents or plunder they get in their treaties, or in war, so as to leave nothing to themselves.

There is not a man in the Magistracy of the Five Nations who has gained his office otherwise than by merit; there is not the least salary, or any sort of profit, annexed to any office, to tempt the covetous and sordid, but on the contrary, every unworthy action is unavoidably attended with the forfeiture of their commission, for their authority is only the esteem of the people, and ceases the moment that that esteem is lost.

Here we see the natural origin of all power and authority among a free people."

—Colden:—History of the Iroquois.

#### Note 6.

"Father Marquette, mild voiced preacher."

"Joliet, the youthful trader."

"Marquette was born in 1637, of an old and honorable family at Laon, in the north of France, and was now (1673) thirty-five years of age. When about seventeen he had joined the Jesuits, evidently from motives purely religious, and in 1666 he was sent to the missions of Canada."

. . . Louis Joliet was the son of a wagon maker in the service of the Hundred

Associates, then owners of Canada. He was born at Quebec in 1645, and was educated by the Jesuits. When still very young he resolved to be a priest. He received the tonsure and the minor orders at the age of seventeen. Four years after, he is mentioned with especial honor for the part he bore in the disputes in philosophy, at which the dignitaries of the colony were present, and in which the Intendent himself took part.

Not long after, he renounced his clerical vocation and turned fur trader. . . In what we know of Joliet, there is nothing that reveals any salient or distinctive trait of character, any especial breadth of view or boldness of design. He appears to have been simply a merchant, intelligent, well educated, courageous, hardy and enterprising."—Parkman:—LaSalle and Discovery of the Great West, pages 48-49.

#### Note 7.

"Bold LaSalle and Noble Tonty."

Parkman thus describes LaSalle's character:—

"Serious in all things, incapable of the lighter pleasures, incapable of repose, find-

ing no joy but in the pursuit of great designs, too shy for society and too reserved for popularity, often unsympathetic, and always seeming so, smothering emotions which he could not utter, schooled to universal distrust, stern to his followers, and pitiless to himself, bearing the brunt of every hardship and every danger, demanding of others an implied deference, heeding no counsel but his own, attempting the impossible, and grasping at what was too vast to hold, he contained in his own complex and painful nature the chief springs of his triumphs, his failures, and his death.”—LaSalle and the Discovery of the Great West, p. 407.

Parkman in a note on page 441 of his LaSalle and the Discovery of the Great West, gives the following account of Tonty:

“The missionary, St. Cosine, who traveled under his escort in 1699, says of him, ‘He is beloved by all the voyageurs. . . It was with deep regret that we parted from him. He is a man who best knows the country; he is loved and feared everywhere.’”

Note 8.

“Pontiac, the far famed chieftain.”



Parkman thus describes Pontiac: "Pontiac was principal chief of the Ottawas. The Ottawas, Ojibways, and Pottawatomes had long been united in a loose kind of confederacy, of which he was the virtual head. Over those around him his authority was almost despotic, and his power extended far beyond the limits of the three united tribes. His influence was great among all the nations of the Illinois Country, while from the sources of the Ohio to those of the Mississippi, and indeed to the farthest boundaries of the widespread Algonquin race, his name was known and respected.

The fact that Pontiac was born the son of a chief would in no degree account for the extent of his power, for among Indians, many a chief's son sinks back into insignificance, while the offspring of a common warrior may succeed to his place.

Among all the wild tribes of the continent, personal merit is indispensable to gaining or preserving dignity. Courage, resolution, address, and eloquence, are sure passports to distinction.

With all these Pontiac was pre-eminently endowed, and it was chiefly to them, urged

to their highest activity by a vehement ambition, that he owed his greatness. He possessed a commanding energy and force of mind, and in subtlety and craft could match the best of his wily race.”—Conspiracy of Pontiac, Vol. I, pp. 182-3.

Note 9.

“Save as member of the Metai.”

Metai and Me-da-we is thus mentioned by Wm. W. Warren, of the Warren family of Massachusetts, who had Ojibway blood in his veins:—

“The grand rite of Me-da-we-win (or as we have learned to term it, Grand Medicine) and beliefs incorporated therein, are not fully understood by the whites. This important custom is still shrouded in mystery, even to my own eyes, though I have taken much, much pains to inquire, and made use of every advantage, possessed by speaking their language perfectly, being related to them, possessing their friendship and intimate confidence, has given me, and yet I frankly acknowledge that I stand as yet, as it were, on the threshold of the Medawe lodge. Among the Ojibways, the secrets of this grand rite are as sacredly



kept as the secrets of the Masonic Lodge among the whites.

Fear of threatened or certain death, either by poison or violence, seals the lips of the Me-da-we institute, and this is the patent reason why it is still a secret to the white man, and why it is not more generally understood. . . In the Me-da-we rite is incorporated most that is ancient among them, songs and traditions that have been descended, not orally, but in hieroglyphics, for at least a long line of generations.

In this rite is perpetuated the purest and most ancient idioms of their language, which differs somewhat from that of the common every day use. . .

They assert that the Me-da-we rite was granted them by the Great Spirit in a time of trouble and death, through the intercession of Man-ah-asho, the universal uncle of An-ish-in-aubag.

Certain rules to guide their course in life were given them at the same time, and are represented in hieroglyphics.

These great rules of life, which the writer has often heard inculcated by the Me-dawe initiations in their secret teaching to

their novices, bear a strong likeness to the ten commandments, revealed by the Almighty to the Children of Israel."

—Minnesota History Soc. Coll.  
Vol. V, p. 67.

### Note 10.

"Or the fighting, wild Docotahs."

The Docotah or Sioux Indians are perhaps the hardiest of all the Indian tribes. Living in a cold country, they were obliged to be alert and active in order to live. Besides being very strong and active, their morals were of a high order. A United States private soldier, who had been stationed for many years in the country of the Sioux, told me in the course of a long, private conversation, that the United States soldiers never dared to make love to Sioux girls,—that whenever any of the boys were so reckless as to attempt it, he took his life in his hands, and not infrequently lost his life in the attempt.

**NOTES  
TO  
CANTO II.**

**Note 1.**

**“At the Village Cahokia.”**

Cahokia was one of the principal French villages in Illinois in 1763. Vincennes and Kaskaskia were the others. Kaskaskia was near the mouth of the Illinois river. Cahokia was nearly opposite St. Louis.

**Note 2.**

**“To the meeting of his clansmen.”**

Warriors often traveled hundreds of miles to attend an important meeting. In 1900 two Indian Chiefs from Old Town, Maine, made a journey by canoe, to Washington City and return, to see the Great Father.

**Note 3.**

**“You know I sent to our French Father.”**

In a speech to some Canadian French during the siege of Detroit in June, 1763, Pontiac used the following language:—

**“I am the same French Pontiac who assisted you seventeen years ago. I am a**

Frenchman, and I wish to die a Frenchman."

#### Note 4.

"When the wampum belts are ready."

In ancient times it (wampum) consisted of small shells or fragments of shells rudely perforated and strung together; but more recently it was manufactured by the white man from marine or fresh water shells. An Indian orator at every pause of his speech, delivered a belt or string of wampum, varying in sizes, according to the importance of what he had said, and by its figures and coloring, so arranged as to perpetuate the remembrance of his words. These belts were carefully stored up, like written documents, and it was generally the office of some old man to interpret their meaning."

#### Note 5.

"Chanting medicine and war songs."

It is interesting to observe that even great war chiefs like Pontiac, in order to increase their power, cultivated the character of a medicine man as zealously as they did that of a warrior. Sitting Bull is an

example in recent years of an Indian personally a coward, who by his cunning, gained great influence over his fellows, through his claim to being a Great Medicine man.

#### Note 6.

“Calling with loud cries, the elders  
To deliver up the traitor.”

Indian custom made it obligatory upon the relatives and friends of a murdered man to gain vengeance. It was supposed that the ghost of the deceased could not rest until he had been avenged.

#### Note 7.

“After the Illini blood law.”

When a murder was committed among the Indians, satisfaction might be made by payment of goods to the dead man's relatives, or by the sacrifice of life for life. If the murderer did not give himself up, one of his relations or tribesmen were required to do so. The money payment was often favored by the older chiefs, because it prevented feuds. A graphic account of an expiation when the murderer gave himself

up, is thus described in Gurdon Hubbard's *Life*, pages 62 to 66. Being the account of an eye witness it has historic value. The account is as follows:

"We progressed leisurely into the mouth of the St. Joseph river, where we were encamped for several days, and were joined by the traders from that river. We reached Grand river early in May (1819) and sought a good camping place up the river, some distance from the Indian camps.

The 'Feast of the Dead' had commenced, and many Indians had already arrived, and for five or six days we were witnesses to their strange, yet solemn ceremonies.

One evening at the close of the feast we were informed that an Indian, who the fall previous, in a drunken quarrel, had killed one of the sons of a chief of the Manistee band, would on the morrow deliver himself up to suffer the penalty of his crime according to the Indian custom.

We gave but little credence to the rumor, though the Indians seemed much excited over it. On the following day, however, the rumor proved true, and I wit-

nessed the grandest, most thrilling incident of my life.

The murderer was a Canadian Indian, and had no blood relatives among the Maniteis, but had, by invitation, returned with some of the tribe from Maldin, where they had received their annuities from the English government, and falling in love with a Manistie maiden, had married her and settled among them, agreeing to become one of their tribe.

As was customary, all his earnings from hunting and trapping, belonged to his father-in-law until the birth of his first child, after which he commanded his time, and could use his gains for the benefit of his family.

At the time of the killing of the Chief's son he had several children and was very poor, possessing nothing but his meagre wearing apparel, and a few traps. He was a fair hunter, but more proficient as a trapper.

Knowing that his life would be taken unless he could rescue it with furs and articles of value, after consulting with his wife, he determined to depart at night in a canoe



with his family, and secretly make his way to the marshes at the head waters of the Muskegon river, where he had before trapped successfully, and there endeavor to catch beaver, mink, marten and other fine furs, which were unusually abundant, and return in the spring and satisfy the demands of the Chief.

As, according to custom, if he failed to satisfy the Chief and family of the murdered man, either by ransom or a sacrifice of his own life, they could demand of his wife's brothers what he had failed to give, he consulted with one of them, and told him of his purpose, and designated a particular location on the Muskegon, where he could be found if it became necessary to return and deliver himself up.

Having completed his arrangements, he made his escape and arrived safely at the place of destination, and having but few traps, and but a small supply of ammunition, he arranged dead-fall traps in a circuit around his camp, hoping with them and his few traps to have a successful winter, and by spring to secure enough to save his life.



After the burial of his son, the Chief took council with his other sons as to what they should do to revenge the dead, and as they knew the murderer was too poor to pay their demands, they determined upon his death, and set about finding him. Being disappointed in this, they made a demand upon the brothers of his wife, who knowing that they could not satisfy his claims, counselled together as to what course to pursue, all but one of them believing that he had fled to Canada.

The younger brother, knowing his whereabouts, sent word to the chief that he would go in search of the murderer, and if he failed to produce him, would himself give his own life in his stead.

This being acceptable, without divulging the secret of his brother-in-law's hiding place, he started to find him. It was a long and difficult journey, as he had no land marks to go by, and only knew that he should find his brother-in-law on the head water of the Muskegon, which he finally did.

The winter had been one of unusually deep snow, and the spring of great floods, which had inundated the country where he

was. The bear had kept their dens, and for some reason the marten, beaver and mink had not been found, so that when their brother-in-law reached them, he and his family were almost perishing from starvation, and his winter's hunt had proved unsuccessful.

They accordingly descended together to the main river, where the brother left them for his return home, it being agreed between them that the murderer himself would report at the mouth of the Grand River during the "Feast of the Dead," which promise he faithfully performed.

Soon after sunrise the news spread through the camp that he was coming. The Chief hastily selected a spot in a valley between two sand hills, in which he placed himself and family in readiness to receive him, while we traders, together with the Indians, sought the surrounding sand hills, that we might have a good opportunity to witness all that might occur. Presently we heard the monotonous thump of the Indian drum, and soon thereafter, the mournful voice of the Indian, chanting his own death song, and then we beheld him, marching

with his wife and children, slowly and in single file, to the place selected for the execution, still singing and beating the drum.

When we reached a spot near where the Chief sat, he placed the drum on the ground, and his wife and children seated themselves on mats which had been prepared for them.

He then addressed the Chief, saying, "I in a drunken moment stabbed your son, being provoked to it by his accusing me of being a coward, and calling me an old woman. I fled to the marshes at the head of the Muskegon, hoping that the Great Spirit would favor me in the hunt, so that I could pay you for your lost son. I was not successful. Here is the knife with which I killed your son; by it I wish to die. Save my wife and children. I am done."

The Chief received the knife, and handing it to his oldest son, said, "Kill him." The son advanced, and placing his left hand on the shoulder of his victim, made two or three feints with the knife, and then plunged it into his breast to the handle and immediately withdrew it.

Not a murmur was heard from the Indian or his wife and children. Not a word

was spoken by those assembled to witness. All nature was silent, broken only by the singing of the birds. Every eye was turned upon the victim, who stood with his eyes fixed firmly upon his executioner, and calmly received the blow without the appearance of the slightest tremor. For a few moments he stood erect, the blood gushing from the wound at every pulsation, then his knees began to quake, his eyes and face assumed an expression of death, and he sank upon the ground.

During all this time the wife and children sat perfectly motionless, gazing upon the husband and father, not a sigh or murmur escaping their lips until life was extinct, when they threw themselves upon his dead body, lying in a pool of blood, in grief and lamentations, bringing tears to the eyes of the traders, and causing a murmur of sympathy to run through the multitude of Indians.

Turning to Mr. Deschamp, down whose cheeks the tears were trickling, I said, "Why did you not save that noble Indian? A few blankets and shirts, a little cloth would have done it." "Oh, my boy," he re-

plied, "we should have done it. It was wrong and thoughtless in us. What a scene we have witnessed!"

Still the widowed wife and her children were clinging to the dead body in useless tears and grief.

The Chief and his family sat motionless for fifteen or twenty minutes, evidently regretting what had been done. Then he arose, approached the body, and in a trembling voice said, "Woman, stop weeping. Your husband was a brave man, and like a brave, was not afraid to die as the rules of our nation demand. We adopt you, your children in the place of my son; our lodges are open to you, live with any of us. We will treat you like our own sons and daughters. You shall have our protection and love." "Che-qui-ock" (that is right) was heard from the assembled Indians, and the trial was ended.

### Canto 3.

#### Note 1.

**"To their village of La Ventum."**

La Ventum—the chief village of the Illinois Indians, was situated a little over a mile below Starved Rock, on a low mound on the bottom land.—Parkman:—LaSalle, pages 223-4.

Hennepin counted over 470 lodges in the village.

#### Note 2.

**"Since the time when Noble Tonty,  
With a mere handful of allies,  
Beat the fierce Five Nations from it."**

In 1683 Tonty was at Starved Rock, holding it with a small force; also in 1684-5 and 6.

#### Note 3.

**"There in grandeur stood their heaven."**

After the fortifications of 1682-7 and the subsequent abandonment of the rock by the French, the Indians were accustomed to flee to Starved Rock for refuge in times of need.



## Note 4.

**"To the inner side they hurried,  
Where a pathway steep and narrow,  
Wound its way unto the summits;"**

There is evidence that a great deal of debris has accumulated, especially on the inner side of Starved Rock, during comparatively recent years. In 1769 'tis likely that the rock was more inaccessible than today.

## Note 5.

**"The only noises  
Were the whisperings of the breezes,  
Through the spreading cedar branches."**

The center of the rock, when I was there in 1892 and '93, was comparatively clear, with the exception of two or three good-sized oaks. Around the extreme edges were quite a large number of cedar trees, some of good size.

## Note 6.

**"By the cliff's edge sat the young brave;"**  
As a rule an Indian, whether descended from a Chief or not, gained his ultimate rank and name by virtue of some deed or

deeds of valor done either in a battle or in a foray. Undoubtedly the origin of the custom of taking scalps, was simply to have proof positive of valor, and to prevent the boaster or impostor from gaining equal rank with the really brave man.

Note 7.

“Meanwhile on the Rock’s high summit, Vengeance dire and stern were doing,”

Revenge with the Indian is not only a powerful motive for action, but it is a duty.

Note 8.

“Still the grasses keep their graves green”

In many places adjacent to Starved Rock, as well as upon the rock itself,—human bones are found in great plenty when any excavating is attempted. When the hotel was built on the inner side of the Rock near its base, many skeletons were dug up. On the Rock itself I found several human finger bones and other fragments in 1892, while digging where the sod has been worn away.

















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